Starting this month, we're experimenting with a new format where we ask a different director at Opus to write an intro for each newsletter touching on an aspect of our work. Let us know your thoughts and suggestions by replying to this email.

Hi there,

Late last year here at Opus, we came to the conclusion that we need to open up an intentional space for co-learning around AI technologies and what they mean for a system change organisation like us.

Many of the folks at Opus have strong personal opinions about AI. Our own relationships with LLMs like ChatGPT range from 'I use them every day' to 'I never use them', but we haven't spent enough time on the topic together to be able to manage the risks and opportunities well. We don't know what our collective *range of tolerance* is and our knowledge and understanding of these technologies is fragmented. For an organisation that tries to operate by consent rather than consensus, this makes decision-making on the topic of AI and LLMs particularly hard.

Futurist Roy Amara believes that, "*We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run.*" No doubt we're already feeling the effects of AI on society – we're deep and going deeper. But we still think there's time to consider what it means for organisations like us in the long term, and to design around their influence and use (or non-use) in the work of trying to tread pathways to more livable futures.

Our hope is that after making proper space to open a thousand cans of worms and grapple with their contents together, we're able to build principles and practices that support regulated, healthy and transparent relationships with any AI or LLM technologies we choose to use.

We've never done a 'learning journey' like this before, but we reckon we can design and host something meaningful. We also suspect there are loads of 'fellow traveller' organisations out there grappling with the same issues.

We're looking for up to three other groups or organisations to work with us. If you're asking similar questions or encountering similar problems in the course of trying to make the world a better place, we'd love to connect and find out if we could work together on this. Please drop me a line by 24 April.

Sam Walby
Opus Director

News and updates

Festival of Debate 2026

We might not be running a full festival programme this year, but fear not! We're instead hosting a series of special events throughout the year inviting some of the most exciting and innovative thinkers of our time to Sheffield.

First up, we have *The Spirit Level* author Kate Pickett joining us on 6 May with her new book *The Good Society*. We then have Jessica den Outer on 21 May with *The Forest Fights Back*, about the global movement for the Rights of Nature.

Get your tickets now

Illustrating the Story Commons

When The Peoples Newsroom were planning their Lessons for a Story Commons series, they knew they wanted visuals that could help express parts of the work that are hard to put into words.

On the Opus blog, Charlotte Bailey describes her process and some stories behind the illustrations:

"There's a playfulness and confidence you have to adopt to claim the page, accepting the risks and the 'mistakes' that come with using a material that can't be erased or undone."

Read the full article

A history of Now Then since 2008

Our Sheffield-based community media platform, Now Then, recently announced long-awaited plans to return to print later this year. On the Opus Blog, we thought we'd look back at the history of the magazine with two of the people who were there from the start (or near enough): magazine editor-in-chief Sam Walby, and long-time Opus director and writer Sara Hill.

Parts one and two are now published in which we speak to Sam and Sara about how the magazine got started, and the first 12 years of the mag's development.

Read Part One **Read Part Two**

Write for Now Then

Got a good idea about Sheffield, and fancy writing about it?

Now Then has recently updated their 'Write for Us' page, to set out more clearly the kind of pieces they're looking to publish.

Give it a read, and get in touch with your ideas!

"We use our platform and our skills to help people make sense of a Sheffield in transition, sharing stories of resistance and hope that bring us closer to a thriving city rooted in cooperation and mutual flourishing."

Find out more

This month in Now Then

This is the part of our newsletter where we highlight some of the best articles this month from our community media platform, **Now Then**.

Sound Café and the rise of African diaspora music in Sheffield

Mayor unveils slick new look for South Yorkshire's publicly-controlled transport network

How can I fight fascism if I get anxious asking for my reserved seat on the train?

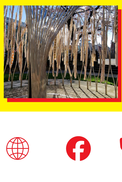
Get involved & collective learning

Here's our regular round-up of ways you can take action and get involved in making and supporting movements for change in and around South Yorkshire, as well as some of the most interesting and thought-provoking things our team have been reading, watching and listening to over the past month.

- Led by the team at Generate – who we'd highly recommend – *Inside Out* is a three-day residential leadership retreat designed to be relevant and responsive to the times we live in. It offers a reflective, restoring, refocusing space – whatever form that takes. It offers a focused, creative time and space for leaders (in the broadest most inclusive sense) to pause on the 'doing' and explore the questions 'Who am I now?', 'Who am I becoming?' and 'What impact do I want to have in the world?' The retreat takes place from 5 to 7 June at Hawkwood House near Stroud, and you can find more details on Generate's website.

- Lucy Gavaghan, our brilliant Operations Manager, recommends two books that she's been getting a lot out of recently. The first is *Footprints: In Search of Future Fossils* by David Farrier. "David Farrier's idea in this book is to try and imagine our present moment of climate and ecological crisis from a far-distant future," writes Tessa Hadley in The Guardian. "What fossil traces will post-industrial human civilisation leave behind for the future to find? Roads and vast cities, long abandoned and forgotten, will show up as layers in the geological strata; our buried radioactive waste will still be deadly; our throwaway plastic will persist until eventually "over the coming millennia, hydrocarbons leach from the fossil plastic, accumulating in small deposits and setting in motion a slow chemical return" to its origins as oil."

- The second is *Strandings: Confessions of a Whale Scavenger* by Peter Riley. "Riley is fascinated by beached whales and the people who move in their orbit," writes Clare Saxby in the TLS. "Each year an estimated 800 cetaceans are stranded on British shores, and the number worldwide is rising owing to chemical pollution, warming seas, overfishing and marine noise. Yet *Strandings* is only obliquely concerned with the threats to living whales; more immediately it's about their afterlives, what happens to them and to us when they breach the boundaries of the human world.



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Opus works to create and support ***responses to achieve urgent systemic change.*** *We do this by telling stories, bringing people together and demonstrating proofs of possibility.*